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Author(s): D. Douglas Waters

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Prince Arthur as Christian Magnanimity in Book One of *The Faerie Queene*

D. DOUGLAS WATERS

In the theological allegory of *The Legende of Holinesse* Spenser uses Prince Arthur as a symbol of the moral virtue of magnanimity or greatness of soul, a "christianized" concept of Aristotle's *megalopsychia* appropriated by St. Thomas Aquinas, Patrizi, Pontano, Cinthio, Piccolomini, Sir Thomas Elyot, La Primaudaye, Cardinal Cajetan, and others. Heavenly grace and Una (truth) bring Prince Arthur to Red Crosse's rescue, just as St. Thomas believed any infusion of the moral virtues presupposed the presence of grace. Having diminished his magnanimity or greatness of soul through actual sins in Cantos II-VII, the Knight of Holiness falls victim to Orgoglio (pride) and is helpless without the coming of Prince Arthur (symbolizing the infusion of magnanimity into Red Crosse's soul). In harmony with most Catholic and some Protestant views of the christian man's ability to cooperate with grace and rise from sin, Spenser shows that grace infuses magnanimity, that Red Crosse cooperates with grace and repents, and that Prince Arthur (magnanimity) kills Orgoglio (pride).

THUS FAR IT HAS not been sufficiently demonstrated that Prince Arthur is Christian magnanimity in the theological allegory of *The Legende of Holinesse.* The identification of the *magnificence* of the "Letter to Ralegh" specifically with magnanimity[1] is now recognized by most scholars—at least in all the books except the first. But, because of the apparent incongruity between the poem and

[1]As regards the poet's terminology, the unpubl. diss. (Chicago, 1927) by Viola B. Hulbert, "Spenser's Twelve Moral Virtues 'According to Aristotle and the Rest,'" explains the possibility that he followed the late medieval and Renaissance practice of incorrectly using *magnificence* and *magnanimity* interchangeably. The more recent solution is to show the former includes the latter: 1) M. F. Moloney, "St. Thomas and Spenser's Virtue of Magnificence," *JEGP,* LII (1953), 58-62; 2) Maurice B. McNamee, S. J., *Honor and the Epic Hero: A Study of the Shifting Concept of Magnanimity in Philosophy and Epic Poetry* (New York, 1960), pp. 144-47; and 3) the unpubl. diss. (St. Louis, 1961) by Sister Mary Anne Winkelmann, "Spenser's Modification of the Renaissance Idea of Glory as Motivation of the *Faerie Queene,*" pp. 204, 211, and 239-41. These three works show, in the words of McNamee, that "Arthur represents magnificence." But, as Moloney first points out, magnificence, in St. Thomas and other commentators on Aristotle, "merely means [continues McNamee] the external impressive manifestation in deeds (*magna facta*) of the internal virtue of magnanimity (*magna anima*)." p. 145.

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the letter and, of course, the flexibility of the allegory, *The Legende of Holinesse* has seldom appeared to picture the "braue knight" as an all-inclusive *moral virtue*[2] (by what ever name the poet may or may not have had in mind).[3] And some scholars do not consider the Prince as a specifically "Christian" concept of magnanimity, either in the first or in the other books.[4] In view of this vast difference of opinion,

[2]A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in "The Faerie Queene"* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 70-71 and 78-79, stressing Spenser's blending of classical and Christian mythology, says Arthur's role is patterned after Christ but imaged as a brave knight perfected in all the virtues. But he does not enter the controversy as to whether the virtue is magnanimity, since he is more interested in the neglected subject of the image of the poet's fiction than the time-worn problem of its moral meaning.

[3]The most fashionable twentieth-century solution to the problem, of course, has been to read Prince Arthur in the religious allegory of Book One as a personification not of the moral virtue of Christian magnanimity but of God's grace. See F. M. Padelford, "Spenser and the Theology of Calvin," *MP*, XII (1914), 13 and *Var.*, *The Faerie Queene*, I, 251; A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH*, XVI (1949), who, giving the Prince a dual role, makes him divine grace in relation to holiness in Book One and magnanimity in relation to natural virtues in all the other books, 202 and 209; Virgil K. Whitaker, *The Religious Basis of Spenser's Thought*, Stan. Univ. Pub. in Lang. and Lit., VIII, No. 3 (Stanford, 1950), 42-43; Maurice B. McNamee, S. J., *Honor and the Epic Hero*, p. 148, although, as pointed out in the above note, McNamee thinks Spenser, in the broader aspects of the allegory, meant Arthur to be magnificence rooted in magnanimity; and the unpubl. diss. (St. Louis, 1961) by Sister Anne, "Spenser's Modification of the Renaissance Idea of Glory as Motivation of the *Faerie Queene*," pp. 214 n 29, 241, and 273. But some critics have doubted the validity of identifying Prince Arthur in the theological allegory as grace. See Theodor Gang, "Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*: The Problem Reviewed," *ELH*, XXVI (1959), 12, who says Spenser's Prince fits neither the Protestant (Luther and Calvin) nor the Roman Catholic concept of grace; and Robert Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Genève, 1960), who also says definitely Arthur is not grace, p. 51. Merritt Y. Hughes, "The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene*," *Etudes Anglaises*, VI (1953), 193-213, does not explicitly question the view of Arthur as grace in the moral and/or religious allegory of Book One, but convincingly calls the Prince in all the books a minister of grace and, among other things (such as the imperial Arthur and a mythical hero), magnanimity even in the moral allegory of Book One. But the comprehensive purpose of Hughes's article does not permit him to go as specifically into the subject as does the above discussion, which has obviously been influenced by "The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene*."

[4]Ernest Sirluck, "The 'Faerie Queene,' Book II, and the 'Nicomachean Ethics,'" *MP*, XLIX (1951-1952), says Aristotelian magnanimity is incompatible with Christian humility, 88; and A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH*, XVI (1949), says

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perhaps the subject in Book One deserves a more concentrated treatment.

As far back as the seventeenth century some critics saw no incongruity in the Prince as magnanimity, shining, as Dryden says in "An Essay on Satire" (1679), "throughout the whole poem" and succoring other characters (hence virtues) "when they are in distress."[5] And, despite later accretions in the studies of Aristotle and magnanimity (written both in and outside the area of Spenser criticism), it is still possible to read Prince Arthur as magnanimity in the sense of greatness of soul in the theological allegory of Book One. It is well known that this is what some translators and commentators still judge to be the original meaning of Aristotle's *megalopsychia.* In the *Ethics,* as has often been pointed out, the magnanimous man has great qualities of soul and body, knows he is great, demands honor to the degree of his greatness, and does great deeds in regard for his greatness. According to one version he partially states it as follows:

> 'Magnanimity,' or 'greatness of soul,' is as the word itself leads us to infer concerned with great matters. . . .[6]

That Aristotle's view of magnanimity was "christianized" by St. Thomas and made available to Spenser through certain writers of the Renaissance and Reformation has long been a critical commonplace.[7] The following passage from St. Thomas

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that by a "Christian standard" "Prince Arthur as magnanimity" would 'be condemned as self-sufficient and proud," 210 n. 26. Janet Spens, *Spenser's "Faerie Queene": An Interpretation* (London, 1934), pp. 50 and 99, thinks he is incongruous with Aristotle's magnificent man and in his quest of Gloriana is much more adequate as a "symbol of the soul's pursuit of the supreme good."

[5]Quoted in *Var., The Faerie Queene,* I, 315.

[6]As trans. J. A. K. Thomson, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Baltimore, 1955), iv, 3, p. 120. Other well-known renderings of the word are as follows: "aristocratic pride" or "great-souledness" in Philip Wheelwright's *Aristotle* (New York, 1951), pp. 219-222; "pride" in Richard McKeon's *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, 1941), pp. 991-95; and, among others, "highmindedness" in J. E. C. Welldon's *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1927), pp. 111-19. For one commentator's support of J. A. K. Thomson's translation of the passage quoted above, see Harry V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism: A Study of the Commentary of Thomas Aquinas on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 123-24; for his sympathetic treatment of the Aristotelian idea in greater detail, see pp. 138-39.

[7]The two most comprehensive are McNamee, *Honor and the Epic Hero,* and Sister Anne, "Spenser's Modification of the Renaissance Idea of

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was well known to the writers of the poet's era:

> 'There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God; something defective which accrues to him through the weakness of nature. Accordingly magnanimity makes man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God. . . . On the other hand, humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency . . .'[8]

Therefore his un-Aristotelian conclusion: man should be humble because of his weaknesses resulting from original sin and magnanimous because of his potential perfections stemming from God's grace.

Spenser himself could have been acquainted with this "christianized" concept from any number of writers,[9] all the way from the time of St. Thomas to his own day—including such figures as Patrizi, Pontano, Cinthio (and other Italians), Sir Thomas Elyot, La Primaudaye, and many others. Merritt Y. Hughes says: "Among the many heirs of St. Thomas the most influential upon Spenser *may* have been Alessandro Piccolomini, whose *Institution Moral* paraphrased the treatment of magnanimity in the *Nicomachaean Ethics;* yet his last words on the subject echo St. Thomas's doctrine of virtue as consisting in pure humility."[10] Sister Anne explains

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Glory as Motivation of the *Faerie Queene*," both making scholarly critical judgments of Aristotelianism on the one hand and "Thomistic Aristotelianism" and Spenser on the other; see also H. S. V. Jones, "*The Faerie Queene* and the Mediaeval Aristotelian Tradition," *JEGP*, XXV (1926), which is now understandably out of date.

[8]As quoted by H. S. V. Jones, "Magnanimity in Spenser's *Legend of Holiness*," *SP*, XXIX (1932), 202, from the *Summa Theologica*, Part II, Q. CXXIX, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

[9]H. S. V. Jones, "*The Faerie Queene* and the Mediaeval Aristotelian Tradition," *JEGP*, XXV (1926), though in a manner that is now too general, places Spenser in the general tradition of Aristotle, St. Thomas, Melanchthon, Cranmer, and Hooker, 292-93 and 298; for a more specific concern for this virtue see Jones, "Magnanimity in Spenser's *Legend of Holiness*," p. 204.

[10]"The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene*," p. 202, citing J. J. Jusserand's "'Twelve Private Morall Vertues as Aristotle hath Devised,'" *MP*, III (1906), 373-83; for Hughes's fine summary of Renaissance writers, see pp. 202-04. Pauline Parker, *The Allegory of "The Faerie Queene"* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 89-90 and 75, states that Arthur in Book One is holiness in its perfect state, the distinguishing virtue of which is humility.

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"that Spenser wanted Arthur to represent the magnificence that brings great efforts to a successful end. This virtue is closely associated with magnanimity in Cajetan's sense of one who does not simply seek after great honors, but who seeks after goods of the soul, or great virtues, or better yet, who accomplishes great acts."[11] And H. S. V. Jones argues for Prince Arthur's magnanimity as a part of fortitude and will.[12] It is obvious that in most, if not all, of these cases the concept of greatness of soul is implicit.

Therefore, although the sights of the scholars mentioned and quoted above are much more broadly focused than those of the present study, their findings on magnanimity seldom hinder but often help substantiate the validity of this whole argument. They have certainly been right in stressing it as a desire for honor, glory, fame, and great actions or a display of beautiful goods and ornaments and great virtues in various aspects of Spenser's poem. For, obviously, these elements and greatness of soul are not mutually exclusive—particularly in an allegory. The only suggestion here is that in the theological and/or moral allegory of Book One Prince Arthur as Christian magnanimity in the sense of greatness of soul can be much more specifically demonstrated than has thus far been done. As has been assumed throughout the above discussion, Spenser's concept is both Aristotelian and Christian, showing what Merritt Y. Hughes and A. S. P. Woodhouse call "an ultimate synthesis of nature and grace in Prince Arthur"[13] and consisting, in the Orgoglio episode, of, among other things, "Christian magnanimity defeating pride."[14] The plausibility of this view exists in the text itself.

As is true in the case of Book Two, "heauenly grace" in Book One operates both before and after the Prince's entrance and exit. For example, in the Orgoglio episode and before the Prince enters the book, "heauenly grace . . . did . . . bless" Red Crosse when Orgoglio surprised him so that he

[11] "Spenser's Modification of the Renaissance Idea of Glory as Motivation of the *Faerie Queene*," p. 238; but, again, she also accepts the traditional view that Arthur is grace in the religious allegory of Book One, pp. 214 n 29, 241 and 273.

[12] "Magnanimity in Spenser's *Legend of Holiness*," p. 204.

[13] "The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene*," agreeing on this point with and paraphrasing Woodhouse, who does not, of course, think Arthur is magnanimity in Book One, p. 199.

[14] "The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene*," p. 199.

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"lightly lept from vnderneath the blow," else "he had beene pouldred all, as thin as flowre" (vii.12).[15] Perhaps heavenly grace allowed the giant to spare his life (vii.14) through Duessa's pleadings and to throw the knight into "a Dongeon deepe" (vii.15) as a warning and punishment. Probably also heavenly grace allows the faithful Dwarfe to find Una (vii.20) and to assign her the way back to the imprisoned Red Crosse (vii.28). The following line is suggestive of the role of heavenly grace, which then led Una to Prince Arthur: "At last she chaunced by good hap to meet / A goodly knight, . . . with his Squire" (vii.29). Again, presumably heavenly grace helps Una and Prince Arthur through the aid of the faithful Dwarfe, "them guiding euer right" (vii.52). But Spenser definitely says the "faire virgin" Una "brings Arthur" to "redeeme her deare" (viii.Arg.)—"this Redcrosse knight" "For whose deliuerance she this Prince doth thither guide" (viii.1). Thus it seems clear that "heauenly grace" and truth bring Prince Arthur to Red Crosse's rescue and that the "braue knight" is thus a minister of grace.[16] It is quite probable that he is such in the sense of magnanimity or greatness of soul.

Therefore, if this is true, the theological allegory makes perfectly good sense. Having become a Christian before the beginning of Book One and thus having first received magnanimity to offset original sin, the Red Crosse Knight (at Gloriana's court, first only "a tall clownishe younge man . . . vnfitte through his rusticity" but later changed, by donning "the armour of a Christian man," into "the goodliest man in al that company") undergoes, in the first half of the book, various allegorical trials that picture him diminishing his greatness of soul by actual sin. And the poet in Prince Arthur's rescue also shows allegorically that God's grace restores magnanimity to the Christian man's soul before he can rise from actual sin and work out his own salvation in cooperation with grace.

Yet, again, Spenser's idea of the grace of God restoring

[15]All Spenser quotations are from the *Variorum.*

[16]See Merritt Y. Hughes's cautiously qualified and comprehensively detailed reading of him at times in each book (including the first) as such. He perceptively shows, however, that the Prince is seldom merely a minister of grace. "The Arthurs of *The Faerie Queene,*" p. 199. William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser: A Study* (New York, 1963), p. 168, calls Arthur "the emissary of grace" in Book One.

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the moral virtue of magnanimity to the soul is similar, in some ways, to St. Thomas's doctrine of infused moral virtues. Observing a distinction not only between the theological and the moral virtues but also between the moral virtues themselves, the medieval thinker speaks of "acquired moral virtues" and "infused moral virtues," even specifying for example "acquired temperance and infused temperance."[17] "Acquired temperance" follows reason and keeps the body healthy and the mind clear, while "infused temperance," like the other "infused moral virtues" to varying degrees, follows the divine standard and commands self-denial and abstinence from food and drink in an effort to live a higher life.[18] Just such regard for the moral virtues—both acquired and infused—is evident in Thomas's following passage:

> Now the virtues which a man acquires through practice, . . . are obviously dispositions by which he is disposed in a manner which befits his nature as a man. But the infused virtues dispose men in a higher way to a higher end, and therefore according to a higher nature, indeed according to the divine nature in which he participates. We call this participation 'the light of grace,' on account of what is said in II Peter 1:4: 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.' It is in fact as receiving this nature that we are said to be born again as sons of God. Hence just as the natural light of reason is something over and above the acquired virtues, which are called virtues because they are ordered by this light, so the light of grace, which is a partaking of the divine nature, is something over and above the infused virtues, which are derived from it and ordered by it. Thus the apostle says in Eph. 5:8: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.' Just as the acquired virtues enable a man to walk by the natural light of reason, so do the infused virtues enable him to walk by the light of grace.[19]

[17]*Summa Theologica*, Ia-2ae. lxiii. 3, 4; trans. T. Gilby in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Texts* (New York, 1955), p. 223.

[18]See *Nature and Grace: Selections From the "Summa Theologica,"* trans. and ed. A. M. Fairweather. Library of Christian Classics, XI (Philadelphia, 1954), 12ae, Q. 110, art. 3, pp. 161-62; hereafter cited as *Selections From the "Summa Theologica."*

[19]*Selections From the "Summa Theologica,"* 12ae, Q. 110, art. 3, pp. 161-62.

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The context of this passage deals with "Whether grace is the same as virtue," his partial conclusion being given as follows: "grace belongs to the first species of quality. But it is not the same as virtue. It is the disposition which the infused virtues presuppose as their principle and root."[20] Accordingly, it appears that with Spenser also grace is presupposed in any restoration of "the infused moral virtues," including of course magnanimity. For, once again as shown above, "heauenly grace" (vii.12) saves Red Crosse from Orgoglio long before it brings Prince Arthur (magnanimity) first to Una's aid and then to the rescue of her Knight of Holiness from the castle of Orgoglio.

Yet, if Prince Arthur as Christian magnanimity does indeed act in Red Crosse's rescue in much the same way as St. Thomas's "infused moral virtues" cooperate with grace, the Prince's role also fits generally into various Protestant schemes and specifically into the pattern of Duessa's symbolic doings—points which fall, however, outside the range of this present paper.[21] But, regardless of how one interprets the poet's theology, this "christianized" concept of magnanimity continues to accommodate the theological, as well as the moral, allegory of *The Legende of Holinesse*. Red Crosse, the Christian man, has diminished his magnanimity through actual sin to the point that he has so enslaved himself to his own pride (Orgoglio), as the commonplace view of the Orgoglio episode explains it, that nothing but God's grace can save him. Grace infuses magnanimity, symbolized by Prince Arthur, and the Knight of Holiness repents.

But Spenser's concept of falsehood's power in the heart of the Christian prevents a one-sided battle and manifests theological and psychological accuracy. The conflict between truth (Una) and falsehood (Duessa) is symbolized on the one hand by the standard bearers of truth—Prince Arthur (magnanimity), his Squire (ministry of the word of God), and his magic horn (message of salvation)[22]—and on the other hand by their initially "vnequall" foes—Duessa (false-

[20] *Selections From the "Summa Theologica,"* 12ae, Q. 110, art. 3, p. 162.

[21] See my article " 'Mistress Missa,' Duessa, and the Anagogical Allegory of *The Faerie Queene*, Book I," *PLL*, IV (Summer 1968), 258-75, esp. 268-71.

[22] Traditionally the ministry of God's word, hence the horn of salvation, truth, and justice as mutually explained by Upton and Padelford, *Var.*, I., 257 and 268.

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hood or false religion), the beast (the presumptuous congregation of the wicked of which Red Crosse is ignorantly a part), and Orgoglio (pride). Since Red Crosse is in bondage to pride, the progress of Prince Arthur (magnanimity) is gradual at first.

In fact the Prince can neither kill Orgoglio nor even save his own life without the diamond shield. If this shield symbolizes repentance, as D. C. Allen has demonstrated almost beyond any reasonable doubt,[23] it is easy to see why the battle takes the course it does. Arthur's coming to the aid of his Squire, who swoons before Duessa's witchcraft, perhaps helps revive Red Crosse's true though weak faith (Una all the while is hopefully watching the battle). And in this context Orgoglio (pride) desperately exerts himself in a final and almost successful attempt to kill Prince Arthur (magnanimity), whose "shield that couered was, / Did loose his vele by chance, and open flew" (viii.19). The "Gyaunt" "has read his end / In that bright shield, and all their forces spend / Themselues in vaine: for since that glauncing sight, / He hath no powre to hurt, nor to defend" (viii.21); "And eke the fruitfull-headed beast, amaz'd / At flashing beames of that sunshiny shield, / Became starke blind, and all his senses daz'd" (viii.20). The phrase *by chance* may not necessarily mean a haphazard event. For, if the shield is the shield of repentance, then the whole allegorical process of Red Crosse's rescue—though mysterious to be sure—is a bit less enigmatic. Repentance, as God's means of drawing men unto him through the interaction of hearing and preaching of his word, never tells the rationalist, or presumably anyone else, why, under the influence of the same message of salvation (the Squire's magic horn again), some people repent and others do not. This psychological change is thus unexplainable by man and hence a chance affair from a naïvely realistic point of view,

[23]See "Arthur's Diamond Shield in *The Faerie Queene*," *JEGP*, XXXVI (1937), 234-43; the poem favors Allen's explanation more specifically than that of the "shield of faith" by W. J. Pienaar, "Arthur's Shield in the *Faerie Queene*," *MP*, XXVI (1928-1929), 63-68. Probably Allen is right when he explains Spenser's deviation from his source as being intentional for allegorical purposes; down to and during the sixteenth century the carbuncle, as he explains, symbolized faith and the diamond repentance. Hence, continues Allen, if Spenser had intended the shield of faith he could easily have retained Ariosto's carbuncle as well as other points which he did take from him, pp. 239-41.

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but apparently a caused event from God's perspective. In Red Crosse's case, then, the unveiling of the shield could symbolize his change from a love of falsehood to a concern once more for truth.

The symbolic stress throughout the entire episode is upon man's own actions in cooperation with grace and truth. Consequently, after the shield is uncovered (Red Crosse's change of heart), Prince Arthur (magnanimity) can and does kill the dazed Orgoglio (pride). Having heard Una's plea to listen to Red Crosse's cry for aid (viii.28) and having charged his Squire with "That scarlot whore to keepen carefully" (viii.29), Prince Arthur, like the magnanimous man in every respect, "with greedie great desire / Into the Castle entered forcibly" (viii.29), exercised due patience toward Ignaro (viii.30-34) from whom he finally took the unused and rusty keys to many of the rooms (viii.34), found the sick knight in the tightly locked but "keyless" dungeon (viii.37), "rent that yron dore" (viii.39), "found the meanes that Prince vp to reare" (viii.40), clearly told Red Crosse the symbolic witch and whore was "The roote of all your care, and wretched plight" (viii.45), and, in harmony with Una's wishes, helped the Squire arraign, strip, and banish Duessa (viii.46-49) for the knight's further enlightenment.

Symbolically, these acts are typical of what, according to Spenser, a Christian's own magnanimity (greatness of soul) does in harmony with grace in any turning from false to true religion. Henceforth, the Christian man (Red Crosse), working in harmony with grace as always, can grow in the knowledge of holiness, purge himself from the results of sin, and save his soul.

WISCONSIN STATE UNIVERSITY, EAU CLAIRE

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